

# Evening Ledger

## AMUSEMENT SECTION

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### What's Wrong With the Movies?

THIS department has had so much to say in praise of the photoplay art that a word of criticism, of very vigorous criticism, can hardly be construed as part of that attack which the movies have had to withstand ever since their birth. Indeed, it is a back-fire against that raging hate which is constantly bringing the violent, vicious or silly plots of so many photoplays as witnesses against the whole art. At the Drama League's discussion of the Drama vs. the Movies, Thursday, that point was constantly emphasized by the photoplay's opponents. As a matter of fact, it doesn't take their opposition to demonstrate that the story is at present the most neglected as well as the most important part of the movies.

### "Successor to the Knicker Shocker"

Walter Prichard Eaton, whose exceptionally acute criticism of the New York stage is now appearing regularly in the Amusement Section of the EVENING LEDGER, says we may call him the "William Winter of the Movies," if we like, the permanent opposition to the youth that now personifies itself in the screen art. Fortunately, he is nothing of the kind. He is simply one of the many persons who turn away either unsatisfied or nauseated from the sex, shock, sensation or silliness which makes the plots of the movies today. In the current American Magazine he writes not unjustly of the movie as "the successor to the knicker shocker" of our youth.

### Sex, Shock and Sensation

There is absolutely no denying the deplorable quality of the average movie story. It seems to escape from the commonplace, the trivial, the sentimental and outworn only by plunging into sex and sensation. The triviality appears the result of mere stupidity and lack of imagination. But the sensationalism calls up visions of vicious commercial pandering. No one can blame the man who cries out and fights against it.

### Sensation Built on Censorship

But there are ways and ways of fighting. And censorship is not the wisest way. As a matter of fact, sensationalism thrives on censorship. Without it the producer must meet directly the wishes of the play-goer. He may make his bid for profits on the basis of sex and sensation; but he must face the undeniable fact that this sort of thing disgusts and tires in the long run. The public, either in the drama, the novel or the short-story, has never supported it for long, especially the convention-bound average citizen who spends his time at the movies.

When, however, you set up a watchdog of official morality you capitalize the thing you are attempting to fight. Producers deliberately add sensational elements to their stories because they know they have an advertising bureau in the censorship which is going to get them publicity for their films, even though it succeeds—as it doesn't always do—in taking out the really offensive parts. As an aid to morality the censorship is a joke. It is town-crier to the pander.

### Sensation Built on Stupidity

The censor points the easiest way to a host of scenario writers who simply haven't the ability to attract public attention with anything but sex or sensation. They can't invent fresh turns on the age-old plots. They can't create anything new. They can't take their place beside the fiction writers of the big American magazines by seeing and putting into story form the changing pageant of twentieth century life. If they are not to turn out the old, old stuff that makes half the scenarios of the movies, they must stoop to the sensational, to the sort of thing that any reasonably intelligent and unscrupulous man can conceive. And its only real novelty lies in the fact that the screen expresses it with a terrible bodily vividness that fiction never touched.

### Expert Testimony

Least this indictment of the average scenario writer sound like mere abuse, listen to some expert testimony. It comes from one of the movie profession's keenest critics, William A. Johnston, editor of the leading trade journal, the Motion Picture News:

"It is a striking fact that among 25 reviews of feature pictures in last week's issue of Motion Picture News, only two mention the author's name—as, apparently, being worth mentioning.

"A very few give any praise at all to the story and that faintly or apologetically. Four plots of the 25 are dismissed briefly as trite versions of the 'eternal triangle.'

"And the leading features of the week carry such criticisms as: 'A plot containing much fat and little meat,' 'the story is almost negligible,' 'the plot is not new,' 'the story is not exactly new,' 'the plot is commonplace,' etc.

### Why?

There is a very good reason—two, in fact. In the first place the average producer doesn't spend enough money on the scenario writer. He is content with the \$35-a-week man. He won't pay the prices that would tempt really original talent to forsake the magazines and learn the movie trade. On top of that, he works his writers to death. They must turn out in a month as many completely worked out plots as they would normally produce in a year of story writing. The only men of ability that movie wages can get are the beginners, the young writers, and the pace soon wears out their originality, their nerves, their very brain.

### Up to the Producer

The producer must stop squandering money on stage stars and trips to Honolulu. He must realize what David Horsely has realized: "The watchword of the producer in the future must be 'better stories.' No matter how competent a company, or what perfect facilities a producer has, the story's the thing. The elements in the production of the good pictures of today, in the order of their relative importance, are: the story, correct casting, competent directing and photography."

### Where Are the Amateur Critics?

This week a book department takes the place of letters to the editor. This is simply because there are no letters. Where are the people who have their own ideas about the plays and photoplays they see? Every play-goer is a potential critic. The professional reviewer on a newspaper is simply a man with more experience of the theatre, and perhaps more ability with the typewriter. Why shouldn't the average man or woman try his hand at telling what he thinks about the amusement he pays for? The EVENING LEDGER will be more than glad to make itself the medium of sound amateur criticisms. Try it! K. M.

## THE PASSING SHOW



### CUT-BACKS

#### Stage Technique Advances

Yes, indeed, actors used to stand three in a row facing the audience. Now they stand three in a row with their backs to it.

#### Perhaps It's Economy

The ultimate unreality of the theatre may be accounted for by the fact that stage-people never finish their wine. But, then, it's probably stage-wine.

#### British Recipe for a Revue

Some Greco-Freako dances,  
Some sere and yellow jokes,  
Some girls, some saucy glances,  
Some Bakat and Poirat cloaks,  
Some blonde and auburn tresses,  
Some imitation pearls,  
Some fleecy, filmy dresses,  
Another lot of girls.

Some blotted orchestration,  
For horn and drum and gong,  
Some Chaplin imitation,  
A man, no voice, some song,  
A star, attendant beauties,  
Some posters, perfect shocks,  
A skit on M. P.'s duties,  
More girls, more smiles, more frocks.

A minimum of reasons,  
A maximum of rot,  
A few more girls to season,  
A tiny pinch of plot,  
A gag about the weather,  
Another girl or two—  
Just mix them all together,  
And there you have Revue.

—London Opinion.

#### Prize Press Pearl

The good old book tells a tale about what happened to a man who kept his talent buried under a napkin. The boy has the right idea. There isn't a great artist alive who didn't have his beginning, and who didn't feel that he was just full of talent. —From the Mutual.

#### So Says the Press Agent

A pun can save the day for many a press agent. The gentleman who "travels ahead of virtue"—traveling chiefly into the censor's office and from there to the courts—supplies the following:

The censor did not say that the producers were making a virtue of neSEXity. Beau Broadway, of the New York Morning Telegraph, wrote that "Virtue would get its own award in the Philadelphia courts." An admirer of the star of the film said it should have read, "Virtue Has Its Own May Ward."

Shakespeare was called to testify before the courts because he wrote, "Dost thou think that because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" The cakes and ale were deleted by the censor.

No reward, by the way, has been offered for the identity of the perpetrator.

### Questions and Answers

Actress—Edna May, former comic opera singer, left the stage in 1907 to marry a New York multi-millionaire. She will appear in motion pictures through the Vitagraph Company, but the money which she will receive will go to the Red Cross and other charities. This is the first time since her marriage that she will be in the glare of the limelight.

J. L. E.—Joseph Byron Totten is a leading man of the Essanay Company.

Jennie—Sunday moving pictures are to be shown in Birmingham, Ala. The City Commission announced that they would not interfere if they were offered during certain hours.

### THE BOOKSHELF

Half a dozen years ago the stage itself was scantily represented on the publisher's lists. Now printed plays and books of histrionic biography are not only plentiful; the boom has reached the movies. Such prominent publishers as the Macmillan Company and Hearst's International Library Company are bringing out solid, authoritative books on the writing and producing of photoplays. Such volumes will be reviewed from time to time in this column.

The Hearst people supply us with "Photoplay Scenarios; How to Write and Sell Them," by Eustace Hale Ball, author not only of an earlier volume on the technique of the photoplay, but of such successful films as "The Traffic in Souls." Mr. Ball draws his information from experience as staff playwright, scenario editor and producing director with the Reliance, Eclair, Majestic and other companies.

"Photoplay Scenarios" is thoroughly readable and gives every indication of trustworthiness. Simply and clearly Mr. Ball explains the proper form that a scenario should take, its divisions into the various sheets describing plot, scenes and actions. He gives two sample scenarios, a comedy and a drama, written by himself, submitted to film companies and ultimately produced.

Other portions of the book take up more abstract matters, such as "the laws of drama," "vitalizing the cast," "moral foundations," "the use of close-ups." There is plentiful advice for the beginner as to record keeping of scenarios sent out, methods of sale, the companies which are buying scripts, technical terms and their uses, editorial rules and censorship conditions.

Grosset & Dunlap are publishing a popular-price photoplay edition of well-known books which have been made into film plays, with many of the illustrations taken from the film. These books make excellent gifts for the photoplay fan and are on sale at all book stores.

The Hearst International Library has recently published in book form "The Goddess," by Gouverneur Morris and Charles Goddard. While it does not adhere strictly to the film version in which Anita Stewart and Earle Williams appear, it makes a readable addition to the large number of books which have been based upon the photoplays.

### THE ART OF SCREEN ACTING

By ETHEL BARRYMORE

I found that I must learn a new mode of expression, acquire a new set of tools, study a new art. On the stage the voice is accompanied by the proper gestures and facial expressions; one is often ineffective without the other; each must suit its complement. The movement and the gesture that would be, were it aided by the voice, the perfect means of expression on the stage, will not do here. They must be different, they have to bear the whole burden, since the voice is stilled. It is a great test of the actor; it compels a call upon resources that have heretofore been in abeyance or but slightly drawn upon. One mumbles some lines to keep the lips moving, but the whole effect must come from the facial expression, the pose and the gestures.